

FALL 2007

# Main Street

M O N T A N A

## 8 THE DREAMCATCHERS

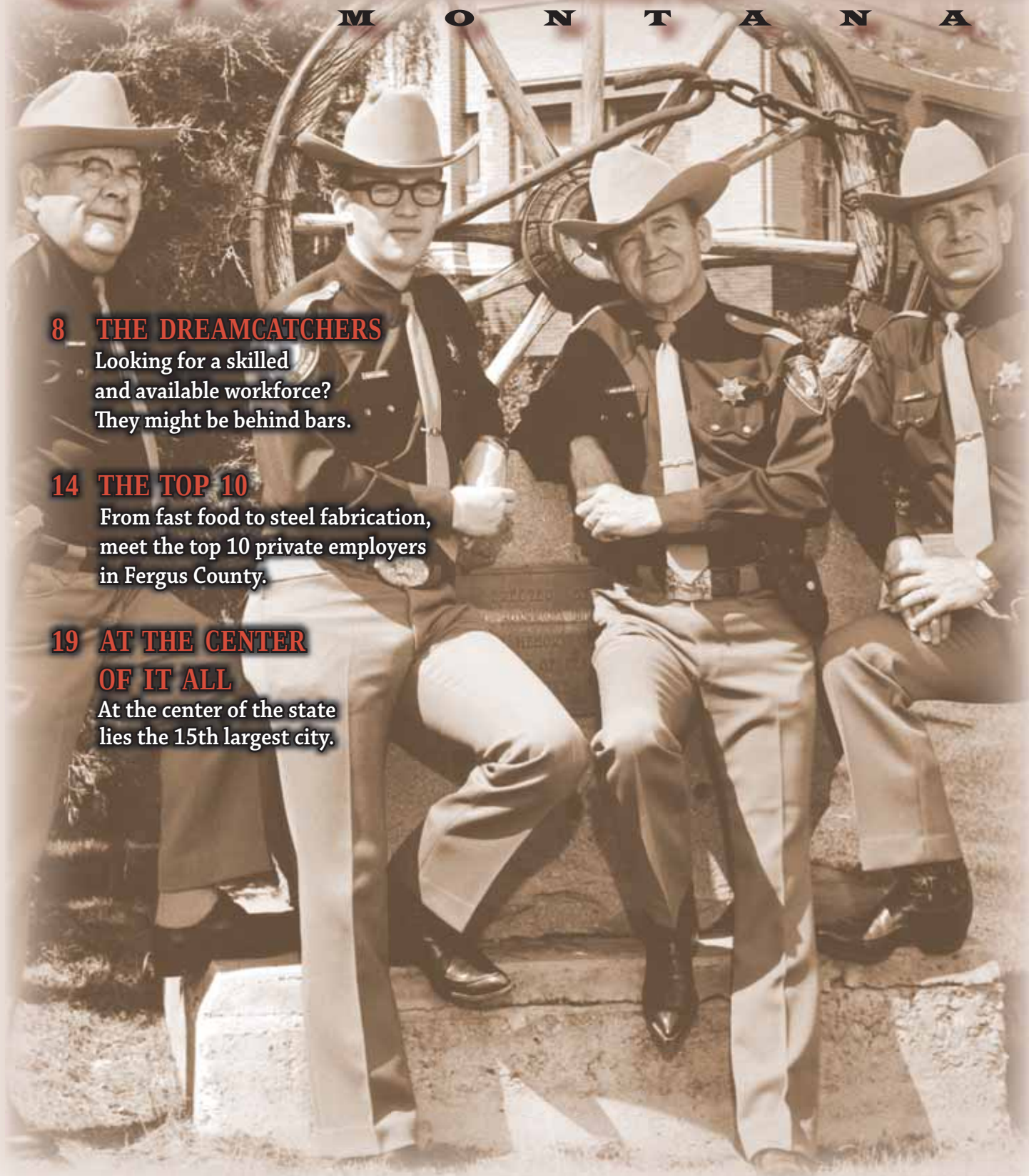
Looking for a skilled and available workforce? They might be behind bars.

## 14 THE TOP 10

From fast food to steel fabrication, meet the top 10 private employers in Fergus County.

## 19 AT THE CENTER OF IT ALL

At the center of the state lies the 15th largest city.





*The Main Street, Courtesy of the Central Montana Historical Museum*

Long before it was Fergus County, this plentiful land provided abundant game for the Indians hunting the riches of what they called “snow hole.” James Fergus, for whom the county is named, was one of the largest cattle ranchers in the area, but he refused to settle in the county seat of Lewistown. He was convinced that there was too much snow, and located his ranch just north, in Roy.

Fergus County’s fertile soil, spring-fed creeks and sheltering mountain ranges made it a preferred destination for the 300 Canadian aboriginals known as Metis, who established camp in 1879. They began building log homes and trading with the Reed & Bowles Trading Post (*Montana’s oldest building*) along the Big Spring Creek. Five years later, an onslaught of white settlers began arriving in Lewistown, followed by the arrival of homesteaders pushing Lewistown to its population peak of 28,000 residents in 1920. Within ten years, more than 10,000 residents relocated to more urban areas of Montana.

Today, those natural assets make Fergus County a state leader in agriculture, with tourism not far behind. The downtown district is known for beautiful Croatian stonework, giving a traditional and dignified air to the courthouse and many other buildings.

Lewistown is a community committed to reinventing itself as it grows its health-care, manufacturing, and construction industries. More recently, it’s developed the Nexus meth treatment facility, a pilot program that is an alternative to incarceration for meth offenders. It is fitting that highlighting Fergus County for this edition of the **Main Street**, the Department of Labor and Industry join forces with the Department of Corrections to address the economic and social impacts of Corrections. The department not only provides job skills and training opportunities for hundreds of inmates, it also has more than 1,200 employees scattered across this state to coordinate the care, management and supervision of more than 13,000 adult and juvenile offenders.

We’ve heard from employers feeling the workforce pinch of Montana’s record low unemployment rate. Nearly eight out of every 10 offenders in Montana are supervised outside of prison, and about 97 percent of Montana’s prison population eventually will be released. It is vitally important that we begin to explore alternative labor pools to fill the gap. We can’t afford to ignore both the economic and social cost of under-using such a critical segment of our labor force.

Keith Kelly, Commissioner  
Department of Labor & Industry

Mike Ferriter, Director  
Department of Corrections

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Pictured left to right: Warren Raitt, Roger Johnson,  
Jimmy Kaaro, Jack Songer in front of the courthouse.  
Courtesy of the Central Montana Historical Museum

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Lewistown Courthouse  
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*The Montana Department of Labor and Industry's 2007 fall edition of Main Street Montana is brought to you in partnership with the Governor's Office of Economic Development, the Montana Department of Corrections, and the Montana Department of Commerce.*



**The Human Resources Division** was established in 2005 through a management initiative that recognized the increasing importance and complexity involved in managing more than 1,200 agency employees. The division includes all human resource programs, staff development and training, and the department's American Indian liaison.



**The Montana Promotions Division** (Travel Montana and the Montana Film Office) is the statewide film and tourism development and promotion program under the Department of Commerce. Travel Montana serves the people of Montana with programs designed to develop and promote Montana as an attractive destination for visitors from around the world.



**The Employment Relations Division** provides services and regulation for Montana's workers' compensation system and for industrial safety. Workers' compensation insurance and industrial safety and health programs are essential tools in maintaining a strong and healthy work environment.

**The Governor's Office of Community Service** is a diverse Governor-appointed body representing a broad cross-section of community service interests and statewide leadership to promote lifelong civic engagement.

**The Adult Community Corrections Division** supervises almost 79 percent of the more than 13,000 offenders who are the Department of Corrections' responsibility. The offenders are managed in a variety of programs, including alcohol and drug treatment facilities, two meth treatment centers, a boot camp, six prerelease centers, a sanction and revocation center, 23 probation and parole offices, and an assessment center.



**Montana Correctional Enterprises (MCE)** provides employment and training opportunities to prison inmates in order to enhance public safety by promoting positive change in offender behavior and helping them reintegrate into communities. MCE employs 72 civilians and offers work and training opportunities to approximately 400 Montana State Prison and Montana Women's Prison inmates.



**The State Workforce Investment Board** advises the Governor on the creation, implementation, and continuous improvement of a comprehensive statewide workforce development system designed to train the maximum number of unemployed and underemployed Montanans as described in the Workforce Investment Act.

**Editors:** Margaret Ore & Michelle Robinson (Editorial Director)

**Graphic Layout:** Casey Greenwood & Stevie Harper



# PROMOTING INDIAN ENTREPRENEURS

Author: Sue Woodrow, Community Affairs Managing Project Director, Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, Helena Branch

**Across Indian Country**, the tribal economic development efforts to promote, enhance and sustain tribal sovereignty have been steadily gaining ground over the last two decades. Until recently, those efforts have largely been tribal enterprises—businesses owned and operated by tribal governments. Private sector business development has generally taken a back seat when Tribal Nations plan and implement economic development strategies.

In 2006, the first ever Montana Indian Business Alliance (MIBA) Conference took place in Great Falls. The conference primarily addressed tribal legal, governmental, and policy issues as well as business financing. The two-day conference drew 250 attendees representing all of Montana's tribes, as well as numerous state, federal and local government and regulatory agencies, nonprofit organizations, financial institutions and private-sector business.

"The concept of focusing on private business ownership in Indian Country is long overdue," says MIBA chairperson Maria Valandra (Cree), who serves as vice president of community development for First Interstate BancSystem. "Together with many tribal, private, nonprofit, grassroots, state and federal organizations, we're working hard to connect resources for all Montana Indians who have the qualities of an entrepreneur and the desire to own a business."

Following the 2006 conference, the Governor's Office of Economic Development and the Montana Department of Commerce joined many of the conference attendees to discuss how to best leverage resources for the training and financing needs of Montana's Indian entrepreneurs. The event resulted in a unanimous vote to form a statewide alliance of organizations dedicated to promoting private sector business development in Indian Country, and MIBA was born.

"Tribal economies are generally lopsided," explains Major Robinson (Northern Cheyenne), Acting Coordinator for the Governor's Office of Indian Affairs and former Indian Economic Development

Specialist with the Governor's Office of Economic Development. "The majority of employment is in federal, state and tribal jobs on our reservations. MIBA demonstrates the importance of private sector business as a driving force in changing how Indian Country does business."

The mission of MIBA, through its four devoted core teams, is to promote private Indian business development by maximizing and developing resources.



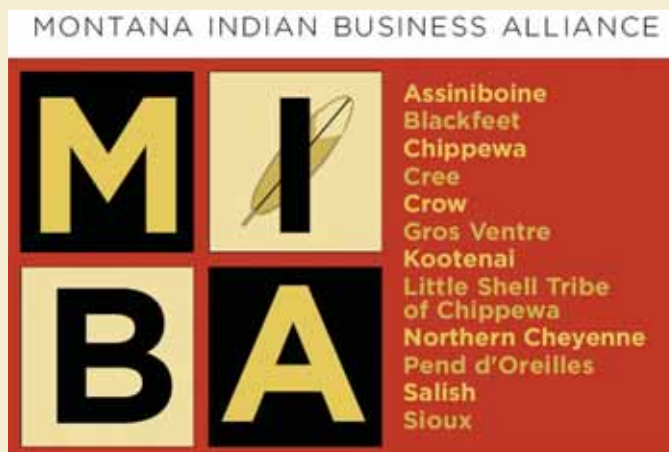
2006 MIBA Conference

tribes' commercial and business laws assists with access to those laws, and provides commercial legal development tools for the tribes.

In addition, the Governor's State Tribal Economic Development Commission and the Montana Department of Commerce partnered with MIBA to create the Montana Indian Equity Fund to begin addressing the equity finance shortage that Indian business owners typically face. "Most importantly, MIBA has raised awareness about the value of supporting private business sector development in Montana's Indian communities," Robinson says.

Although just over a year old, MIBA has served as a model and provided assistance in the development of similar Indian business alliance initiatives in South Dakota, Wisconsin and Minnesota, with inquiries from a number of other states.

MIBA is hosting its second annual Montana Indian Business Conference on September 18-19 at the Red Lion Colonial Hotel in Helena and will feature an Indian Business and Indian Artist Showcase, sponsored by the Montana Arts Council. For more information about the Conference and MIBA, visit [www.mibaonline.org](http://www.mibaonline.org).



# SERVICE IS A HABIT OF THE HEART

**I am convinced that giving of oneself in service** leads to civic engagement and responsibility. Neighbor helping neighbor is the foundation of Montana's strong communities. Now, more than ever, Montana calls upon you to engage in service.

The Montana Commission on Community Service is committed to the ethics of civic responsibility by encouraging citizens to engage in service, involving youth in the life and work of communities and expanding service opportunities for all Montanans.

Recently you may have heard about a national study that ranked Montana seventh in the nation with 290,000 Montana volunteers dedicating 37.9 million hours of service. What you may not know is that of the 290,000 volunteers, nearly 32,000 working people participated informally by working with their neighbors to improve their community.

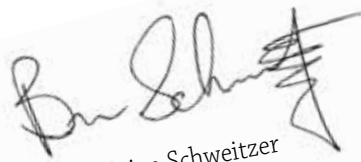
Montana also scored the highest in the nation in the Civic Life Index. The index is based on volunteering, voting, neighborhood engagement, and civic infrastructure. This statistic shows that in Montana, we are building stronger, more vibrant communities.

The Governor's Office of Community Service has six AmeriCorps programs that directly benefit low-income families, the elderly, at-risk youth, and minority and migrant groups. These programs include the fine work of the Montana Conservation Corps, Montana Campus Corps, Literacy Support Corp, Montana Making Sense, Community Partners and the Jobs for

Montana's Graduates Foundation.

By early 2008, the Office of Community Service will launch ServeMT, a website to connect volunteers with volunteer opportunities and provide training on volunteer management to provide sustainability to community based organizations across the state.

Give generously, volunteer willingly and respond positively when asked how you can participate. A community thrives when individuals assume their civic responsibility through service. Together, let's make service a habit of the heart in Montana.



Brian Schweitzer  
Governor



To learn more about how you can contribute to your community, contact the Governor's Office of Community Service by calling 406-444-2573 or visit [www.mt.gov/mcsn](http://www.mt.gov/mcsn).



# THE MONTANA DINOSAUR TRAIL'S NEW PREHISTORIC PASSPORT IS YOUR TICKET BACK IN TIME

Author: Marissa Kozel

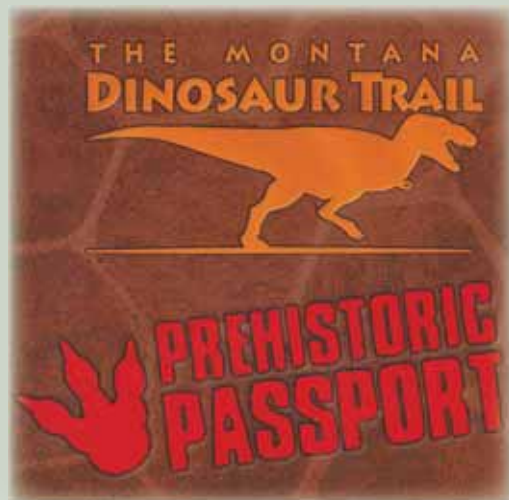
The Montana Department of Commerce is inviting you to travel back in time, millions of years – and explore the Montana Dinosaur Trail with a Prehistoric Passport as your guide.

The Prehistoric Passport is the newest “tool” visitors can use to unearth the primordial treasures of the Montana Dinosaur Trail. The passport describes the extraordinary dinosaur displays, exhibits and activities found at each of the trail's 15 facilities in 12 Montana communities. Several trail destinations are an easy drive from Fergus County and many communities in north central Montana.

“The world's first T-rex was found in Montana. We provided North America's first baby dinosaur bones, we have some of the world's best preserved dinosaur specimens, the largest skeletal replica, and the largest collection of dinosaur fossils found in the U.S.,” said Governor Schweitzer. “We've helped teach the world about dinosaurs. Let's celebrate this unique resource by grabbing a passport and visiting the exceptional facilities along our dinosaur trail.”

“The Montana Dinosaur Trail is a unique opportunity for visitors to meet prehistoric Montanans, claws, jaws and all,” said Commerce Director Anthony Preite. “From the museums to the dig sites, each location provides an unparalleled learning experience that tells one of Montana's most fascinating stories and highlights the state's elite status in the profession of paleontology.”

Each passport includes Fun Fossil Facts, and a section for field notes and official stamps that verify the passport owner has visited each trail facility. Once visitors collect stamps from all the facilities, they will receive a gold seal, a certificate of completion and an exclusive Montana Dinosaur Trail Prehistoric Passport T-Shirt specifically designed for those who complete the trail.



Courtesy of MT Dinosaur Trail facilities

The Prehistoric Passport is available for \$5 at each trail facility. Passport owners have five years from the purchase date to complete the trail and be eligible for the rewards. Proceeds from passport sales are used by the non-profit trail organization members to support their facilities and the promotion of the Montana Dinosaur Trail.

The Montana Dinosaur Trail was created in 2005 to highlight the unique and world class dinosaur displays and interpretative programs found in Montana. The trail and its funding partners were honored as the 2007 Montana Tourism Partnership of the Year by Montana Governor Brian Schweitzer and the Montana Tourism Advisory Council. The trail website, which includes facility and contact information, is at [www.mtdinotrail.org](http://www.mtdinotrail.org).



Museum of the Rockies Stegosaurus

## The Montana Dinosaur Trail facilities include:

- ✓ Carter County Museum, Ekalaka
- ✓ Makoshika Dinosaur Museum, Glendive
- ✓ Makoshika State Park, Glendive
- ✓ Garfield County Museum, Jordan
- ✓ Fort Peck Interpretive Center, Fort Peck
- ✓ Fort Peck Field Station of Paleontology, Fort Peck
- ✓ Phillips County Museum, Malta
- ✓ Dinosaur Field Station, Malta
- ✓ Upper Musselshell Museum, Harlowton
- ✓ Blaine County Museum, Chinook
- ✓ H. Earl Clack Memorial Museum, Havre
- ✓ Depot Museum, Rudyard
- ✓ Two Medicine Dinosaur Center, Bynum
- ✓ Old Trail Museum, Choteau
- ✓ Museum of the Rockies, Bozeman

## LOOKING FOR A SKILLED AND AVAILABLE WORKFORCE?

Author: Bob Anez

Photos Courtesy of Department of Corrections



*Lumber Processing*

Joseph Anthony has a good job and a bright future. And he owes it all to prison.

Anthony worked in the lumber processing operation for Montana Correctional Enterprises at Montana State Prison for about a year and was a quick study. He was assigned clerical duties at first, but quickly found he had a knack for more. He learned how to operate the saws and grade lumber.

By the time he left the prison in July 2005, Anthony had marketable skills. He got a job at Fox Lumber Sales in Laurel, where he is the health and safety specialist and quality control manager.

"Before this, I never kept a job for more than several months," Anthony says. "Working for lumber processing taught me much more than how to process lumber. I learned that is OK to take pride in what you do. I learned that every job, no matter how insignificant it may seem, is important. I learned that the only way to sleep at night is to work hard all day."

Anthony isn't alone. He is one of hundreds of inmates who have worked in Montana Correctional Enterprises (MCE) training programs, developed skills and work ethic, and parlayed those into good jobs after their release from prison.

Tim Schroeder, plant manager for Fox Lumber, counts eight former inmates on his payroll and is glad to have them.

"It's been a great deal," he says. "They have to stay clean. They're dependable people. They're reliable, they appreciate their jobs, they appreciate the opportunity and I have great success with parolees."



*Furniture Manufacturing*



*Laundry Facility*



*License Plates*



MCE, which is largely self-supporting, operates a wide variety of industry programs at Montana State Prison and Montana Women's Prison. A division of the Montana Department of Corrections, MCE includes a furniture manufacturing plant, dairy, cattle ranch, crop production, upholstery shop, vehicle maintenance program, print shop, license plate factory, sign shop, lanyard production, boot factory, archery products assembly, sewing and embroidery shop, dog-training program, food factory and prison canteen.

MCE offers vocational-education programs that include auto mechanics, laundry, welding and machining, driver's training, shop practice safety, forklift operator safety, accounting, technical drawing, computer training, drafting, information processing and technology, and business skills. MCE employs inmates in the non-food production areas of its food factory, which produces about 10,000 meals a day; operates a cannery that supplies goods to the Montana Food Bank network; and produces vehicle training aids for Toyota Motor Corp.

MCE also maintains an inmate fire crew that assists in combating wildfires at a cost to the state that is nearly \$700 a day cheaper than conventional firefighting crews. When not battling blazes, the 10-15 man team is busy with work assignments within the prison and community projects in the Deer Lodge-Anaconda area. They gather firewood for distribution to needy families, pull weeds, install playground equipment and helped prepare the fire-gutted historic Rialto Theater in Deer Lodge for restoration.

"We train inmates as a skilled work force for us in private enterprise throughout the state," says Gayle Lambert, MCE administrator. "Our No. 1 product is not furniture or milk. It is the inmates we release into the community."



*Boot Factory*



*Combining Crops*



*Lower Feedlot*

MCE minimizes its competition with private retail business. It directly sells furniture only to state agencies and contracts with five office supply stores for selling its furniture on the retail market. Dairy milk produced by 350 cows is used by the prison, five other state institutions and the Powell County Jail. Excess milk is sold to Darigold, and cream is sold to several confectioners that manufacture and market specialty chocolates, caramels and syrup. Beef cattle from the nearly 38,000-acre ranch are marketed only out of state.

"The minimal competition created by MCE is easily outweighed by the positive effects that its programs provide Montana taxpayers, the state's economy and Montana employers," Lambert says. "We offer a quality product – inmates with valuable job skills, strong work ethic and the chance to be a productive, tax-paying citizen in Montana. All this is done at no cost to taxpayers."

About 400 men and women inmates work in the programs. In 2006, an average of 144 inmates were employed in the Montana State Prison industries programs, 137 were enrolled in the vocational-education courses, 90 worked in agricultural operations and 30 worked in the industry programs at the Montana Women's Prison. The number of inmates involved in MCE programs increased 8 percent since 2001.

Beyond its ability to prepare inmates for gainful employment and successful lives after release, MCE represents a significant financial presence in Montana. In 2006, the division spent \$14.8 million on goods and services and almost 60 percent of that, or \$8.7 million, was spent in Montana. Annual MCE spending increased 77 percent from 2003 to 2006. During those four years, MCE spent a total of \$41.5 million and seven out of every 10 dollars were spent in Montana.

**THEY MIGHT BE BEHIND BARS.**

# KNOWING SOME EMPLOYMENT LAW IS NO BULL

Author: Maggie Connor

**Community camaraderie and social responsibility** with our friends and neighbors is a trait Montanans proudly portray. These qualities are particularly true in farm and ranch communities, where neighbor helping neighbor has been the way of life for generations. Handshakes solidify deals and measure an individual's worth. These characteristics make Montana a wonderful place to live and work, but they do not necessarily protect our businesses and livelihoods from unforeseen liability.

The Montana Department of Labor and Industry and workers' compensation insurance companies far too often witness good intentions go awry.

A rancher was approached by a local man who was out of work and wanted to start a fencing business as an independent contractor. The rancher wasn't looking for fencing work, but out of goodwill hired him so he could earn some money. Unfortunately, the young man was discovered dead by a fence section he was working on at the ranch; he had been caught in the tractor's auger. The ranch was determined to be his employer and held responsible for payment of benefits to the decedent's family under the Workers' Compensation Act. While this example is a horrible story, it is not a rare occurrence.



Maggie Connor  
Employment Relations Division



What can we learn from this tragedy? Ask questions about a person's level of experience and hire individuals that are experts to fulfill your need. The rancher in this case provided the tractor with an auger for the worker and explained to him how to use it.

Whether you need custom combining services, seeding, hay hauling, or other services, you must decide if you want to control how the service provider performs his work (an employee) or if you want to hire an individual that requires no training or oversight (an independent contractor).

If you hire employees, you provide the workers' compensation, while independent contractors are required to either provide their own coverage or obtain an independent contractor exemption certificate (ICEC).

Hiring an independent contractor without one of these two things will result in the state declaring them as your employee. An incident happened recently to a rancher whose neighbor helped him seed and hay. During an audit, the workers' compensation insurer identified payments made to the neighbor, who had neither the ICEC or workers' compensation insurance. He was declared an employee. Imagine the surprise and shock to the rancher when the bill arrived. Fortunately, this situation has been resolved to everyone's satisfaction, but the frustration and time it took to resolve was very unpleasant.

To view a list of all active independent contractors who hold exemption certificates simply visit [www.mtcontractor.com](http://www.mtcontractor.com). Pay careful attention to the occupation(s) listed: if the occupation shown differs from the job the individual is completing for you, the ICEC is not valid for your purposes. Calling the department at 406-444-7734 is another way to obtain this information.

If the worker does not have an ICEC, we recommend requesting a certificate of insurance from the business to verify workers' compensation insurance. To verify if the policy is active and the owner is covered under the policy, you must contact the insurance company. A small amount of due diligence is your best protection.

Many twists and turns occur in employment relationships. This article briefly explains some obstacles a business may face, but does not cover all situations, and does not replace or supersede any law, rule or regulation. Please feel free to contact me personally at [mconnor@mt.gov](mailto:mconnor@mt.gov) or 406-444-9586 with any questions or concerns you may have.



# HIRING MONTANANS WITH CRIMINAL RECORDS

Author: Rob Marvin

Most people find the prospect of going to prison terrifying, but for inmates being released back into the workforce, the transition can be just as frightening. For an offender reintegrating into society, finding legal employment is probably the most important step, and often the most difficult. A criminal record is one of the toughest barriers to getting a decent job.

Federal statutes prohibit offenders with certain types of felony convictions from working in certain occupations. For some licensed occupations, offenders may be denied licensure on the grounds of "unprofessional conduct." In addition, many employers are reluctant to hire former inmates, fearing that the social stigma may hurt their business.

A study by the Montana Department of Labor titled Labor Force Outcomes of Montana's Ex-Offender Population, by Dr. Brad Eldredge (*Montana Economy at a Glance, February 2007*) reveals that in any given quarter of 2005, only around 30% of ex-offenders held a job covered by unemployment insurance.

Many employers are finding it difficult to fill vacant entry level or lower paying positions, given Montana's tight labor market. In light of this workforce shortage, Montana's offender population might be viewed as a largely untapped source of labor. Turn to page 23 for employer perspectives on hiring probationers and parolees.

Many Montana employers may be unaware of the vocational training programs available to offenders, both during their incarceration and through pre-release centers. Montana State Prison inmates may earn a GED as well as participate in various vocational education programs, including information processing, technology systems, automotive technology, industrial and agricultural equipment technology, and more. Pre-release centers provide a high level of supervision for offenders, including

regular drug testing and job skills training. Often an inmate's release is dependent upon his ability to find and maintain employment.

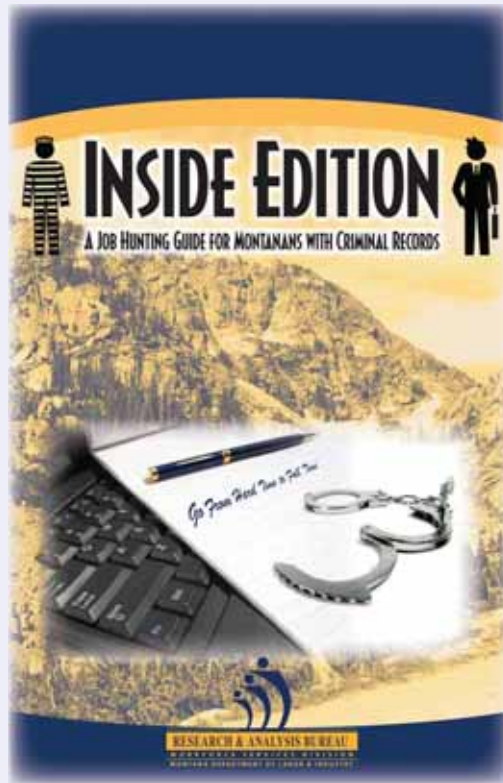
In addition to easing the burden of finding workers, hiring offenders can benefit employers through tax credits. The Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) allows a tax credit of up to \$2,400 per employee on wages paid during the first year of employment. If employers have concerns about the trustworthiness of a potential employee, the Federal Bonding Program can insure an

employer against theft, forgery, larceny, or embezzlement. To apply or learn more about the Work Opportunity Tax Credit, contact Department of Labor's Christy Robbins, 406-444-9046.

The ability of offenders to stay out of prison depends largely on their ability to find and retain employment. Statistics from the U.S. Probation and Pretrial Services System showed that recidivism was 500% higher among unemployed offenders, and that 80% of all offenders who returned to prison in 2005 were unemployed. It follows that providing more career resources to offenders will better prepare them to make the transition from incarceration to employment.

The Montana Career Resource Network (MCRN) publishes *Inside Edition: A Job Hunting*

*Guide for Montanans with Criminal Records*. This resource guides the user through all stages of the employment process from searching for job openings, writing resumes, and interviewing, to keeping a job once they've been hired. Each section places special emphasis on how to handle difficult questions about the job seeker's criminal record. The guide also details the rights of offenders, addresses the concerns of potential employers, and provides information on additional resources that can help offenders succeed in the workforce.



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BY THE BOOK

*Inside Edition* is available for free download at [www.ourfactsyourfuture.org/admin/uploadedPublications/446\\_Inside\\_Ed\\_Jan06\\_Web.pdf](http://www.ourfactsyourfuture.org/admin/uploadedPublications/446_Inside_Ed_Jan06_Web.pdf)  
To request printed copies, please contact the Research & Analysis Bureau at (406) 444-2430 or toll-free at (800) 541-3904, or write to us at P.O. Box 1728, Helena, MT 59624-1728.

# PARTNERS IN RECRUITMENT

*Author: Bob Anez*

The Montana Department of Corrections has long worked with the Department of Labor and Industry on employment issues, but that partnership reached a new level this year when the agencies launched a new recruitment effort for corrections.

The Labor Department's Workforce Services Division invited representatives from Job Service offices across the state to participate in an event to educate Job Service staff about employment opportunities in the corrections profession.

The effort also was intended to change the way that Job Service offices deal with employers in general, and the corrections initiative was one of the first undertaken based on this new practice.

The project focused on recruitment of correctional officers in secure facilities and probation and parole officers in community corrections programs. What emerged from that effort was a strategy for promoting interest in sometimes hard-to-fill corrections jobs across the state.

Ingrid Childress, administrator of the Workforce Services Division, said the Job Service offices are committed to the effort.

"There has been a renewed interest in suggesting careers in the corrections area to our job-seekers and career-seekers that come in," she says. "It's a more focused approach we're trying to take."



*Ingrid Childress  
Administrator, Workforce  
Services Division*

Job Service staff is able to discuss with prospective employees their personal knowledge of corrections based on tours of correctional facilities and to share a DVD featuring corrections employees talking about their careers, Childress said. "It alleviates some of the misperceptions they have learned from TV or movies, and show that it's a real career option for them."

The collaboration between the two agencies is especially critical because the Corrections Department, the third largest in state government with more than 1,200 employees, has just one recruiter.

"Time spent with the job service centers not only give their employees insight into what jobs we have available, but also help them locate the type of employee we are looking for – committed, good communication skills, positive role models – people who are interested in a career and not just a job," says Rae Ann Forseth, the DOC recruiter.

Forseth is provided access to Job Service offices to stage corrections career fairs for job seekers, and Job Service officials agreed to broaden outreach into more rural communities of Montana.

"I get time with potential candidates that allows me to talk about corrections – the entire department – and to let them see the variety of jobs, from correctional officers to ranch supervisor to medical and teaching staff," Forseth says. "A wide scope of opportunity is presented. And they get a more personal approach with me – one on one, to ask any question, and it won't affect the application process."

"Most individuals see corrections as just correctional officers and then they find out we need a nurse, teacher or a mechanic and they are amazed at the number of jobs," she adds. "One comment I hear a lot is 'I never thought that you had that job inside a prison' or 'I never knew you had a need for that type of job in corrections.'"

Corrections officials learned that stories about actual employees able to rise through the ranks and take advantage of promotion opportunities go a long way toward attracting new employees.

Marwan Saba is one such story. He began as a correctional officer at Montana State Prison and is now in charge of juvenile detention licensing in the Youth Services Division. Curt Swenson started his career as an intern at the Missoula probation and parole office; today he is chief of the Staff Development and Training Bureau.

"If you're a correctional officer, and you have the initiative and interest, attaining the warden's position isn't unrealistic," said Steve Barry, administrator of the department's Human Resources Division.



*Rae Ann Forseth  
Corrections Recruiter*



## Sex Crimes, Drunk Drivers, Gangs and Mental Health Problems

# WELCOME TO MIKE GERSACK'S WORLD

Author: Dawn Handa

Mike Gersack's office is an area of north-central Montana that is larger than the state of Maine. His responsibility is a population larger than the number of residents living in any of 85 Montana cities and towns.

Gersack heads a staff of 34 in overseeing the state's second-largest probation and parole region. Fergus County is the largest county in the region, accounting for 13 percent of the land area and about 100 of the offenders under supervision in the region.

Gersack, 60, began his corrections career in 1971 with what was then the Department of Institutions. He had just graduated from the College of Great Falls with a degree in sociology. Eleven years later, he earned a master's degree in criminal justice from his alma mater.



Mike Gersack

Gersack began as a juvenile parole officer and became an adult probation and parole officer five years later. Another four years passed before he was named regional administrator in Great Falls.

Corrections is a very different profession than it was when Gersack entered the field 36 years ago. As it has across the nation, the corrections system in Montana has grown to meet the demand for the care, supervision and management of an ever-increasing number of Montana offenders.

In the 1970s, the region had just eight probation and parole officers to cover the vast area and supervise about 500 offenders. Today, the region has 29 officers and five administrative support staff to supervise more than three times as many offenders. Three decades ago, all officers worked out of the regional office in Great Falls. But the 1980s saw openings of satellite offices in Havre, Shelby, Cut Bank and Lewistown.

Mike has seen a change in the direction of corrections, from a system focused simply on locking away offenders to one embracing an innovative philosophy of treatment and rehabilitation.

Probation and parole officers used to merely supervise offenders without providing much direction or assistance with treatment needs. Today, probation and parole officers provide offenders with more guidance, and the department offers treatment options such as the 80-bed Nexus methamphetamine treatment center in Lewistown and felony DUI treatment programs in Warm Springs and Glendive. The regional office also contracts with a full-time chemical dependency counselor and a full-time mental health counselor to assist offenders in their efforts to succeed on community supervision.

"With the change in focus of corrections from just supervising to being more treatment-focused and proactive, rather than reactive, we have gone to more specialized caseloads for offenders with sex crimes, felony drunken driving convictions, gang activity, and mental health problems," Gersack said.

"Our region also is more involved in drug treatment courts, and our officers are involved in the community by helping to educate the public regarding offenders and the job officers do in the communities," he added.

Gersack said the duties of regional administrator have shifted as the offender population has grown. Originally, he handled all disciplinary hearings and the supervision of staff. Today, two supervising probation and parole officers are in charge of the direct supervision of staff and conducting hearings, and third office will be added soon to assist with the workload.

"Mike Gersack's loyalty to this agency is matched by few," says Department of Corrections Director Mike Ferriter. "Mike truly is a state employee who is very considerate of the needs of his staff, the public, the department and offenders. Mike takes the mission of the Department of Corrections very seriously and leads his region with that mission in the forefront."

# TOP 10 PRIVATE EMPLOYERS

Albertsons



Hi-Heat



Central Montana Medical Center



Valle Vista Manor



McDonald's





## Century Construction



## Eddies Corner



## 4 Aces



## MK Weeden Construction Inc.

(Photo Courtesy of Annette Hayden)



## Allied Steel



# FERGUS COUNTY AT A GLIMPSE

Author: Brad Eldredge

**Total population:** 11,496  
(Census, 2006)

**Median age:** 45.6 (Census, 2005)

**Median household income:** \$33,414  
(Census, 2004)

**Average unemployment rate:** 3.8%  
(BLS LAUS estimate, 2006)

### Top five industries in terms of employment:

- 1) Educational Services
- 2) Food Services and Drinking Places
- 3) Hospitals
- 4) Heavy and Civil Engineering Construction
- 5) Executives, Legislative, and Other General Government Support

For information on employment by industry, new businesses, labor market information, job projections, and hourly pay by occupation visit [www.ourfactsyourfuture.org](http://www.ourfactsyourfuture.org).

Or call the Montana Department of Labor and Industry's Research and Analysis Bureau (406) 444-2638, or mail P.O. Box 1728, Helena, MT 59624.

# IN FERGUS COUNTY

*\*This list includes only private industry employers subject to Unemployment Insurance. Railroads and city, county, state and federal government agencies (including public school districts and universities) are excluded.*

# TOP 10 PRIVATE EMPLOYERS IN FERGUS COUNTY

## Albertsons

"Our mission is to serve the customer better than anyone else would serve them," exclaims **Albertsons** store director Bob Agostinelli. "We do this through our core values of passion, focus, urgency, standards and integrity."

"SUPER VALU and Albertsons are committed to an advanced orientation program and lifelong learning. Employees discover early on that they work for the customer and not me," explains Agostinelli. A staple of the Albertsons family is the Albertsons Academy of lifelong learning. The academy provides employees access to free online training programs. "Some are required for particular job functions, but all are accessible to employees seeking training and advancement opportunities," he said.

The 30,000 square foot Albertsons is the largest grocery in a 100 miles, serving folks as far away as Stanford and Winnett. Four of Agostinelli's 90 full time staff members have more than 100 years of combined service since Albertsons 1999 acquisition of the Lewistown Buttreys store: (pictured on map) Grocery Clerk Marlin Newton (31 years), Cashier Diane Blythe (22 years), Non-Food Manager Vonda McConnell (22 years) and Meat Manager Ed Schwartz (31 years). Agostinelli, who has invested nearly three decades with Albertsons, emphasized that the Lewistown staff is the friendliest "because we live our mission."

## Allied Steel

In 1975, Jim Southworth opened his first welding shop in Billings, MT with little more than a \$110 Buzz Box and a dream. He and his wife, Patty, both Lewistown natives, wanted to raise their growing family in Lewistown. In 1979, a father of five, Jim sold his shop in Billings and turned his attention to Lewistown and a business he would later call Allied Steel.

In 1993, with pioneering spirit, Southworth purchased and moved the business into an abandoned sheetrock plant located just outside of Lewistown. After a year of dust abatement, **Allied Steel**, with six employees and four welding machines, began operating at its current location. Today, Allied Steel has outgrown the original footprint of their facility. The business now occupies 70,000 square feet of production space, runs two shifts per day, and offers year-round employment to 70 world-class steel fabricators.

Southworth retired from operations in 2001 leaving the business in the hands of three of his children; Julie Walsh, Pat Southworth, and Jeff Southworth, along with brother-in-law Brian Krings, a confidant and employee of Allied Steel for over 25 years. Though the face of the business bears little resemblance to past years, the principles that created the business remain the same. Walsh believes, "The employees at Allied Steel are here because of the lifestyle Lewistown offers. We are privileged to employ such incredibly talented and hard-working people. Our solid reputation and consistent quality speak volumes."

## Central Montana Medical Center

**Central Montana Medical Center (CMMC)** is the medical backbone of its community, combining state-of-the-art technology with quality, compassionate, healthcare services to customers spread over more than 17,000 square miles.

"For nearly 30 years, the medical center has been an important part of the economic, employment and social fabric of our communities," says Foundation and Community Relations Coordinator Ann Tuss, a fourth generation Lewistown native. Each year, CMMC pays more

than \$12.1 million in benefits and salaries to approximately 380 employees. The facility is supported by an active local medical staff of 16 physicians, as well as 14 consulting/visiting staff who provide regular monthly services. Some employees travel a six-county area delivering health care, and more than 40 staff members commute from 10 area towns to work for CMMC.

"Because CMMC is a non-profit and not supported by local taxes, we rely on the central Montana community for support," Tuss explains. "That support comes in two forms - use of our services, and charitable donations for items such as gurneys for rural ambulances." From inpatient surgery, to rehab, to homecare, CMMC strives to be one of the best - right here at home."

## Century Companies Inc.

**Century Companies Inc.** of Lewistown was founded in 1975 with a mission to provide urban-quality asphalt paving and infrastructure services to the remote, rural communities and businesses of eastern Montana and northern Wyoming. Thirty-two years later, with nine asphalt plants and more than 125 employees, Century shows no signs of slowing down or falling short of its original mission.

In the last decade, Century has expanded its asphalt paving services to include aggregate production and placement, underground sewer and water construction, concrete curb and gutter placement, and large-project construction management services. From paving highway, county and city streets to airport runways, Century's urban-quality production dots the landscape of even the most pioneer of areas.

Whether it's building the airport in Harlem, the truck weigh station on the freeway near Wibaux or the city streets in Lewistown, Century crews work hard to ensure safety, quality and integrity on every project. Those same crews enjoy the benefits of great employment and benefits for their families living throughout Montana, Wyoming and the Dakotas. Mission accomplished for three decades running at Century.

## Eddies Corner Inc.

Chances are if you are driving toward Lewistown on the way to Judith Gap, you've stopped at **Eddies Corner** for a cup of coffee, a bite in the restaurant, fuel, a restroom break, souvenir or just because it's the landmark that puts Moore, Mont. on the map.

Joe Bauman, owner since 1978, recalls the first time he began working at the corner "on the payroll" in the 1970's. "Of course, growing up in the family business I'd been working prior - just not getting paid for it." Joe's parents Duke and Ot Bauman purchased the truck stop from Eddie in 1951, and Eddies Corner hasn't closed one day since. "We're 24/7 and that includes all major holidays," says Joe. "If you are working at Eddies Corner, chances are you're working a weekend."

"There's value in treating employees right. You can't expect people to give 110 percent in the summer and then cut 'em back in the winter," he says. Mildred Lemmon, a Judith Gap native and 36-year employee agrees. So does Laurie Bauman (28 years), who started at Eddies Corner in high school and later returned as the owner's wife, or Barbara Wichman (25 years) and Vicki Kipf (24 years). In fact, of the 38 people working at Eddies Corner, nearly half have worked there for a decade or more. People can say that the landmark's success is due largely to location, and that is true. But as the folks that work there tell you, the business is continually looking at ways of reinventing itself. "There's no standing still in business," says Bauman, "If you're not moving forward, you're moving backward."





#### 4 Aces Restaurant and Casino

For more than 30 years, Rahn's Grocery occupied the spot that later became **4 Aces** in the fall of 1989. Three sisters bought the space once occupied by the grocer and contracted Lonny Bergstrom to operate the casino side of the house. Within two years, the women sold the business to Lonny and his wife Cindy. Today, the Bergstroms continue the family restaurant and casino with daughter, Dez, longtime cook Dale Benes, and an average of 40 exceptional employees.

"We're not known as a drinking establishment," says Lonny. "In fact, we serve nine times more food than drinks." The 15-seat counter is turned over at least three times a lunch period by Lewistown's working-class guys looking to grab a hot meal of homemade chicken fried steak and mashed potatoes for a mere \$5.50 a plate. Many a four-top table is occupied by local senior women, who Lonny calls "adopted moms," ordering their \$4.50 lunch special and "expecting a hug with their meal," he says with a smile.

In 2006, 4 Aces cooked and served over 45,000 pounds of beef, 30,000 pounds of potatoes and more than 65,000 eggs. According to Lonny, 4 Aces is a meat-and-potatoes, family-friendly establishment serving great quality food. Hearty portions for a decent price seem to please the 200,000 patrons that walk through its door each year.

#### Hi-Heat Industries, Inc.

Susan Knedler and Charlie Guinn visited Susan's parents in Geraldine during Montana's Centennial Celebration (1989) and talked about wanting to visit more often. Nine months later, with the assistance of a good-faith loan from the Lewistown County Commissioners, they relocated **Hi-Heat Industries** ([www.hiheat.com](http://www.hiheat.com)) a custom electric heating element manufacturing business, from Kansas City to Lewistown.

"We received 100 applications to fill eight slots," recalls Knedler of their first job posting in 1990. "And those eight folks produced more in their first year than my staff of 14 in Kansas City," adds Guinn. By 2007, they found themselves relying on the Lewistown Job Service to fill 24 additional jobs in less than 60 days for their 8,000-square-foot facility. "With their assistance, we've been able to create an atmosphere where employees want to work, as an employer of choice," reports Knedler. Today, Hi-Heat boasts 64 employees in their 22,000-square-foot manufacturing plant.

Guinn began learning the manufacturing business in 1967 from two of his then competitors. Knedler has worked as general manager, bookkeeper and production assembler. Neither have regrets about relocating. "For years we worked in the business," says Knedler. "Now we can work on the business." Guinn says that the state doesn't do enough promotion to attract businesses to Montana. "Montana's workforce is the most productive in the world."

#### McDonald's

Pete and Linda Peterson began researching **McDonald's** franchise opportunities when Pete began working for McDonald's of Great Falls in 1987. Pete started his career with McDonald's as a part-time office assistant and crew person while on active duty for the Air Force. "It took three years from our original research to extensive management development classes at Hamburger University to become an operator," Pete says. However, the timing was perfect in the eyes of Lewistown operators Jeff and Mary Monfort.

The Monforts opened the Lewistown McDonald's in August 1991, as one of a limited number of participating rural McDonald locations. In October of 1995, the couple was looking for a buyer when they were notified of the Petersons' franchise approval.

Soon after, they called the couple to see if they were interested in acquiring the Lewistown franchise. "Choosing a first-time location was a big deal for us. We thought Lewistown is a great place to raise our kids and it will provide the quality of life we're looking for," Pete says. "It's important to find balance between work and family...which can be very challenging when you're operating a business with up to 48 employees from 6 a.m. to midnight."

Striving for balance is also reflected in the Petersons' charitable giving. As a board member of the local Ronald McDonald's House children's charities, Pete says with certainty, "Linda and I, as well as all other Montana operators, are committed to supporting the charity."

#### MK Weeden Construction Inc.

When Monte K Weeden of **MK Weeden Construction Inc.** began his one-man operation in 1991 he had nothing but a pick-up truck with a spare tire in the back. Weeden, who grew up in the family construction business in Broadus, Mont., was running bulldozers by the age of six. He always knew he would one day have his own business.

After graduating with his degree in diesel technology and metallurgy, he moved to Lewistown to work for the Kendall Mine. Then one day, his intentions of selling a dozer would change his career path. "I had purchased and fixed up an old dozer with the intent to sell. But the buyer, unable to afford the equipment, asked me to bid on a landfill job instead," he recalls. "I got the job and the business took off from there."

Today MK Weeden Construction Inc. employs nearly 125 seasonal employees in major earthwork projects, mine reclamation and construction, excavation, and state highway construction. Monte, who says he used to work 18 hours a day, seven days a week, seems to still be at it years later. Between paid jobs, Monte can be found giving back to his community in excess of \$100,000 in time and materials at the Central Montana Shooting Complex and Fergus County High School.

#### Valle Vista Manor

Dale and Gloria McLain opened **Valle Vista Manor** in 1964 as a residential nursing home with a maximum occupancy of 101. Little did they know they would fill every bed. Although receptionist Hazel Aasved was not there to welcome the very first resident, she can tell you plenty about Valle Vista, based on her 32-year investment.

Aasved advocated for assisted living, observed the original construction of 13 units, and watched it grow to 29. She was there to serve as the institutional memory when the Lantis management team arrived. She can tell you about the culture of the around-the-clock skilled nursing home and assisted living residences and the remarkable people who have passed through the door, both those seeking and those providing care.

"We offer individualized and personalized continuum of care that exceeds traditional medical care," says Administrator Mary Hardy. Aside from traditional physical, occupational and speech therapies, Valle Vista offers pet therapy, which explains why four residents of Valle Vista are sheep. "Our residents grew up rural - allowing them the opportunity to bottle feed the baby sheep is our way of honoring their past." Today Valle Vista Manor employs 70 exceptionally caring staff members, provides nursing home residency for 60 and assisted living for 20 folks who call Valle Vista home.

# WE ARE MONTANANS REFLECTIONS



*Megan Bourne*

Megan Keenan was only 8 years old and just a little scared about this new place to call home. When she moved with her family to Lewistown in 1987, the only home she had ever known was in Saco, 140 miles away. She didn't know what to expect from this central Montana city that dwarfed her familiar town.

But what Megan found in Lewistown was a community that welcomed newcomers and fresh faces with open arms. "Everyone was very embracing" of the new girl, she remembers.

Her recollections of growing up in Lewistown are of a Norman Rockwell life in a small town where living was simple and fulfilling – creating the kind of memories to wrap yourself in when life seems to make little sense and comfort is needed.

"We never locked the doors," Megan says. "If a neighbor needed to borrow some laundry soap, they just walked right in. You never had to worry about being out on your own. Everybody knew everybody."

Now Megan Bourne, she is part of landmark national effort to curb sexual assault in prisons. She holds an historic position as the Department of Correction's first coordinator responsible for implementing the Prison Rape Elimination Act, passed by Congress in 2003. She has worked in corrections since 1999 and began working for the department in 2004 as contract monitor at the Cascade County Regional Prison.

Megan's first view of Lewistown was the lush green landscape she encountered moving there that summer 20 years ago. Her family bought a red house on Broadway near the junior high and she attended elementary school at Highland Park. It was bit daunting to face a class of 25 fellow students, instead of the eight she knew so well back in Saco. But on the first day of school that fall, Megan met Chassidy and the two have remained good friends ever since.

For Megan, summers in Lewistown meant going to the swimming pool and then stopping by Al's Fifth Avenue, a mom-and-pop neighborhood grocery, for a fudge bar or Popsicle. Floating Spring Creek in an inner tube during the dog days of summer, soaking in Warm Springs, a local swimming hole, and attending the annual chokecherry festival and Fergus County fair were part of growing up. So were the annual Christmas Stroll, class trips to Showdown Ski Area, weekly catechism class, slumber parties, playing basketball, and dancing tap and ballet.

Megan's stepfather operated a logging company and she would sometimes ride with him in the big truck. She helped wash and perform routine maintenance on the trucks and worked at Little Big Man Pizza. There, she worked with her high school friends and got to know the regulars who would come into the restaurant for coffee on certain nights.

Familiar faces were everywhere in Lewistown. Megan couldn't use her parents' credit card to gas up her car without someone mentioning they saw her doing it. "I always got busted," she says with a laugh. "It was very difficult to get away with anything."

But Megan learned a lot growing up in that environment. She learned to appreciate the generosity of neighbors and friends and the value of knowing what can be achieved with hard work and not with handouts.

"In a small town like that," she says, "it's not just family that brought you up. It's also the community that embraced you and taught you."



*Freshman Basketball*



*Senior Portrait*



# LEWISTOWN: AT THE CENTER OF IT ALL

*Author: Brad Eldredge and Tyler Turner*

"The familiar lyrics 'purple mountains majesty above the fruited plain' take on new meaning when you live in Lewistown," exclaims Karen Kuhlmann of the Lewistown Arts Center. "It's what you see when you look any direction. A sight that inspires the spirit, soothes the soul and kindles creative expression."

Lewistown is located at the geographic center of Montana and is the state's 15th largest city, with an estimated population of 6,083 in 2006. Fergus County is Montana's 15th most populous county and had an estimated 11,496 residents in 2006.

The population of Fergus County peaked in the 1920s, with over 28,000 people residing in the county, making it the fourth largest county in the state. The population of the county has slowly fallen since that time, but remains among the larger counties in the state. Though Fergus County was a major population center in the early 1900s, a majority of its citizens were not located in Lewistown. Less than 25% of the population resided in Lewistown in 1920. As the county population has declined, Lewistown has remained relatively stable and now houses over half of the county's citizens.

The average wage per job in Fergus County was \$26,523 in 2006. Overall wages grew by 7.8% between 2005 and 2006. This increase was higher than the statewide average of 5.0% and indicates that the average worker in Lewistown and Fergus County has seen a significant increase in the level of their take home pay.

Per capita income has remained relatively stable for residents of Fergus County, increasing at an average rate of 5.8% since 1969. This rate of increase has allowed the county's income level to remain on par with the state as a whole and has helped to ensure that its residents enjoy the same standard of living as other areas in Montana.

The largest industrial sector in the county's economy is Health Care & Social Assistance, with employment of 810 in 2006. Other significant sub-sectors include Retail Trade, Accommodation & Food Services, and Public Administration.

Though not large in terms of employment, Highway Construction plays an important role in Fergus County's economy. The county's construction firms are awarded contracts across the state and provide high wages to their employees. In 2006 their 242 employees earned an average wage of \$52,881. This is almost twice the county average and provides a significant boost to other local businesses which supply these firms with goods and services.

Agriculture is also a significant sector in the county's economy. Wheat and hay are the major crops, with over 300,000 acres in production. Cattle ranches are also an important part of the county's economy, with the third largest cattle herd in the state in 2006. Several well-known purebred ranches sell seedstock to buyers across the state and country.



*Courtesy of Nikki Steele*

Visitors to Fergus County can expect to find a wide variety of natural features. The Missouri River forms the northern border of Fergus County and much of the surrounding land has been designated part of the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument. The southwest corner of the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge is also located within Fergus County. Two mountain chains, the Big and Little Snowy ranges, are found in the southern portion of the county and provide a stark contrast to the vistas to the north. Whether it's open range or mountain peaks, Lewistown is truly in the center of it all.

If you have a chance to visit Lewistown, one treasure not to be missed is the **Central Montana Historical Museum**. From prehistoric fossils to the Bataan Death March, the artifacts on display showcase history through dioramas and relics from ranching, Native American life, mining, and railroading.

Central Montana evolved from a prime hunting area for prairie tribes to a trading post in the steamboat era and one of the pioneer ranches of territorial Montana, owned by vigilante Granville Stuart. Charlie Russell spent formative years cowboying in the Judith Basin. A homestead display illustrates daily life of a 'nester' through household items, clothing, and school memorabilia. More recently, Billings resident Ben Steele, Bataan Death March survivor, has generously lent artwork for permanent display. Visit <http://www.destinationLewistownmontana.com> to learn more.



# THE MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE: EARNING HIGH MARKS ON THE HI-LINE AND BEYOND

Author: Marissa Kozel



Tony Preite, Director  
Department of Commerce

The Montana Department of Commerce has a long history of economic development in north-central Montana, and its commitment to positive economic change is no more evident than in Fergus County. From Lavina to Lewistown, commerce has provided millions of dollars in funding to Fergus County over the years. In the last two years alone, the department has funded more than a dozen area projects totaling more than \$12 million.

Whether the agency is replacing a bridge critical to the infrastructure of a north-central community, or creating safe and attractive affordable housing for working families, Commerce Director Anthony Preite always has the future of Montana's rural economy on his mind.

"North-central Montana is made up of the same kind of hardworking people I grew up with," said Preite, a Havre native. "Our rural communities were built on the backs of these hardworking people and the success of these communities depends on a productive economy and good paying jobs. We fund projects that make a difference."

In 2006, the department helped create 43 well paying jobs in Fergus County by funding the Nexus methamphetamine treatment facility in Lewistown. According to Mike Thatcher, Chief Executive Officer of the Community Counseling and Correctional Services with a new or expanded correctional facility like Nexus the payroll benefits are approximately \$1.6 million or roughly \$37,200 average salary and benefit package.

"We saw this project as two opportunities," said Preite. "We could create solid employment for a significant number of people in Fergus County and satisfy Governor Schweitzer's commitment to develop new community rehabilitation programs that keep meth offenders out of our prison system."

The Department of Commerce provided \$374,000 in Community Development Block Grant-Economic Development funds to the city of Lewistown, for an extension of water and sewer infrastructure to the Nexus facility. An additional \$50,000 in CDBG-ED funds was granted to the facility for workforce training of new employees. The department also issued over \$9.2 million dollars in tax exempt bonds through the Montana Facility Finance Authority for building construction, matching funds for sewer and water infrastructure improvements, and equipment necessary to start the project.

"With guidance from Governor Schweitzer, the Department of Commerce is ushering in positive change across Montana," said Preite. "We're proud to support projects that support all Montanans. We won't be successful until everyone feels that change."



Pictures include Governor Schweitzer, breaking ground and construction of the Nexus methamphetamine treatment facility in Lewistown.

**MONTANA**  
Department of Commerce



# IMPROVING OUR ECONOMIC WELL BEING

Authors: Chris Catlett and Anne Wolfinger

**Lewistown business owner** Susan Knedler of Hi-Heat Industries contracts an occupational therapist to study her work environment so that she can be more competitive in today's marketplace. What's the correlation? Hi-Heat Industries understands that by rotating their employees in production, they reduce unnecessary injury and in turn, lower their workers' compensation costs.

Injury prevention is pivotal to lowering business costs. According to the 2005 Bureau of Labor Statistics, Montana's injury rate is 57% higher than the national average for lost time injuries.

High incidence of injury and illness impacts not only workers' compensation insurance costs, they reduce the time that workers are on the job, resulting in lost productivity and competitiveness. It is estimated that Montana could save between five million and 45 million dollars in workers' compensation insurance premiums if we lowered our injury and illness rates to the national average. This staggering savings estimate does not include the indirect costs of injury, which are estimated to be three times the direct costs.

Other key elements that impact workers' compensation rates and productivity include workers' compensation fee schedules and medical utilization and treatment guidelines, early-return-to-work programs, and claims settlement processes.

In an effort to address workers' compensation rates, the Department of Labor and Industry and Lt. Governor John Bohlinger commissioned a Workers' Compensation Labor-Management Advisory Council. The council is comprised of five employer representatives and five labor representatives. The council will explore policy solutions for the primary cost drivers in workers' compensation.

The ultimate goal of the council's collaborative work is to enhance business competitiveness through a healthy, productive workforce, while maintaining or enhancing benefits to injured workers and reducing insurance costs.

The study involves a four step process:

**First**, the council is exploring mechanisms to adopt a statewide safety initiative aimed at education,

consultation and enforcement of health and safety management and culture.

**Second**, the council is reviewing information on medical fee schedules and utilization and treatment guidelines used by the medical community to provide treatment to injured workers. Montana's average incurred medical cost per claim is higher than all the study states, except Kentucky. Montana sets maximum medical fees much higher than the country's median for surgery and radiology. Overall, Montana's maximum medical fees are approximately 67% higher than Medicare, compared to the median at nearly 55% higher than Medicare. The council, in partnership with the Department of Labor & Industry and other stakeholders, is working to improve treatment effectiveness, timeliness and cost, which benefits both the workforce and employers.

**Third**, the council will be exploring mechanisms to return injured workers to work as quickly as possible. Research shows that the faster an employee can return to work, the better the outcomes for the worker and the better the productivity and competitiveness of the employer. For example, the National Council on Compensation Insurance (NCCI) data indicated the accident year 1999-2002 average number of days to return to work in Montana was 136 days compared to the countrywide average of 85 days. Increased lost time durations significantly increase the amount of wages an injured worker loses and increase the total costs of benefits.

**Fourth**, the council will be exploring ways to settle claims in a manner that benefits workers and employers and, ultimately, lower workers compensation premiums. The council has discovered that Montana claims remain open longer than other states studied by the Workers' Compensation Research Institute (WCRI). Ten to 11% of indemnity claims are settled in Montana and medical benefits are closed in about 3% of settlements. The WCRI's CompScope (2002/2005) data (10 states) show a median of 38% claims settled, most with closed medical benefits. Increased duration of medical claims increases incurred costs.



Chris Catlett & Anne Wolfinger

Advisory council meetings are open to the public and public comment is encouraged.

For more information on the council, visit

<http://erd.dli.mt.gov/wcstudyproject/labormngmntadvisorycouncilonwc.asp>

# LINK TO CHANGE AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

*Author: Bob Anez*

**It's called Nexus for good reason.** The new methamphetamine treatment center in Lewistown lives up to its name by providing a link between correctional and treatment services for offenders plagued by meth addiction and trying to successfully return to their communities.



*Courtesy of Bob Anez*

But Nexus represents another kind of connection – to the economic health of the Lewistown community where it has been welcomed with enthusiasm.

The 80-bed facility, serving male offenders with a second or subsequent conviction for meth possession or a conviction for operating a meth lab, opened at the end of May. It has an annual budget of \$3.2 million, including a payroll of \$1.6 million for 43 employees. The average salary is about \$37,200.

A \$9.2 million project, Nexus is designed, financed, constructed and operated by Community, Counseling and Correctional Services Inc. under contract with the Montana Department of Corrections. Offenders spend nine months in the intensive treatment program, followed by six months of aftercare in a prerelease center. They have the ability to avoid prison and shorten their sentences by successfully completing the program.

Gov. Brian Schweitzer marked the Nexus opening by praising the innovation of the program and the support from the Lewistown area.

“Thank you Lewistown for being part of this grand experiment with corrections,” he said.

“You have said to the rest of Montana and the country that we’re willing to try something new; we’re willing to stake out a new course.”

In addition to offering a novel alternative to prison for meth addicts, Nexus has become a catalyst for economic development in Lewistown, says Kathie Bailey, executive director of Snowy Mountain Development Corp.

Located adjacent to the airport at the west edge of the city, Nexus required installation of water and sewer lines to an area where such services were either limited or nonexistent. Nexus developers spent almost \$1 million on the infrastructure improvements. Bailey says the Nexus project helped local officials obtain a community development block grant to help with the improvements. “We were able to take water and sewer lines all the way to the airport terminal,” she says.

That not only eliminated problems for existing businesses in the area, but also has enticed new businesses there, Bailey explains. New and existing buildings no longer have to rely on septic systems, and the expanded water line has bolstered water pressure to the properties for fire suppression, she says.



"We have had the land resource available to use, but it has not had the necessary water and sewer infrastructure to expand businesses and attract new businesses," she says. "Now we have that capability. We are seeing expansion; we are seeing new construction."

Before now, a U.S. Bureau of Land Management facility that loads firefighting tanker planes had lacked sufficient water pressure to do the job quickly. Another federal agency, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, is constructing a new building in the area and making use of the new water and sewer service.

Jack Morgenstern, chairman of a leading construction services company called Century Companies Inc., has built a hangar and office at the airport—a project that Bailey says had been delayed by the lack of adequate water and sewer service.

A community-based education program that offers college courses in conjunction with Montana State University-Northern is moving into the old BLM building and will not have to worry about replacing the old septic system that served the building.

An antique club meeting hall in the area can do away with its portable toilets, thanks to Nexus-related improvements. And Western Transportation Institute, a research facility tied to MSU-Bozeman and specializing in cold-weather product testing, is negotiating with airport officials to operate there. Bailey says the institute's interest was spurred by the infrastructure additions.



*Courtesy of Bob Anez*

## TOEING THE LINE

*Author: Bob Anez*



Jim Simonich knows Lewistown-area business owners well. The veteran probation and parole officer for the Montana Department of Corrections finds himself in a daily partnership with employers who have offenders applying for work or already on a payroll.

Simonich says most of the probationers and parolees he supervises are from the Lewistown area and employers know them or their families. But business owners with an offender's job application in hand always ask the same questions of Simonich, no matter who's applying.

They want to know the person's crime, sentence and whether they are complying with conditions imposed on their community placement. They want to know if the offender has had drug abuse or other problems. They want to know if the applicant will be a dependable, trustworthy employee.

Simonich gives them all the information they want and coaches offenders looking for work to do the same, especially when asked about their criminal history. "Don't lie to your employer even before being hired," he says. "It's good to be upfront with these guys and tell them what they want to know."

Some employers will not hire an offender, period. But most recognize that offenders can be loyal, honest and hard-working employees. "They are watched more closely than other people in the community," Simonich says of the 90-100 offenders he supervises. "They know that they can't goof up. They know they have to report in here. Law enforcement knows who's on probation and, if they see anything weird, they will call."

What many employers may not know is that they can obtain a federal tax credit of \$2,400 for each offender they hire.

Jobs are important and scarce, so most offenders toe the line to keep one, Simonich says. He does his part by encouraging employers to keep him posted on how their offender-employees are doing. "The lines of communication between employer and this office are wide open," he says.

# ONE-STOP FOR YOUR BUSINESS AND EMPLOYMENT NEEDS

Author: Chris Wilhelm

Business, economic development, education, and workforce systems have always had strong partnerships in Montana's communities. These partnerships leverage resources to enhance their programs' services and improve long-term employment outcomes. Last year, partners working together utilized approximately \$133 million to help businesses, job seekers, students, and workforce professionals find employment and career resources.

A strong referral system and "no wrong door" approach allow partners to serve clients in the most efficient manner possible. According to Program Profiles data collected from program managers throughout the state, in 2006 business services utilized 13% of the funding, youth services utilized 19%, and adult and dislocated worker services utilized the remaining 68%.

"The State Workforce Investment Board (SWIB) is formally recognizing these long-standing partnerships by way of the certification of One-Stop Systems throughout the state," SWIB Director Leisa Smith emphasized. "Montana's One-Stop System achieves the federal vision for statewide workforce development, which benefits our people, communities, and economy."

At a recent SWIB meeting, Chairman Dan Miles applauded the efforts of the SWIB and the One-Stop Systems, citing the recent certifications of 9 additional systems for a total of 15 One-Stop Systems throughout Montana.

"These certifications recognize and formalize effective community partnerships that have existed within our communities for years, but have largely gone it alone," Miles shared.

The State Workforce Investment Board, comprised of 34 individuals representing labor, public sector, private sector, legislative and tribal entities, advises the Governor on the creation, implementation, and continuous improvement of a comprehensive statewide workforce development system, designed to train the maximum number of unemployed and underemployed Montanans as described in the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Sections 111(d) and 117(d). To learn more visit [www.swib.mt.gov](http://www.swib.mt.gov).



Central Montana One-Stop

## SEEKING NOMINATIONS

### 2008 DESIREE TAGGART MEMORIAL AWARDS

*Desiree Taggart had a gift for fostering relationships to improve productivity, creativity, economy, and efficiency within Montana's Workforce Development.*

Each year the SWIB recognizes three individuals from the following categories who contribute to Montana's workforce development system:

- Outstanding Business - for profit; outstanding business - not for profit; quality program - private sector
- Quality Program - public sector; individual workforce development achievement - private sector
- Individual Workforce Development Achievement - public sector for those who contribute to Montana's workforce development system:

Send nominations to the State Workforce Investment Board, Attn: Chris Wilhelm, PO Box 1728 Helena, MT 59624-1728, no later than May 31, 2007. Nominations forms and details about the awards are available at [www.boards.mt.gov/swib](http://www.boards.mt.gov/swib) (Resources tab).

Contact Chris Wilhelm at 406-444-4480 or [ChrisWilhelm@mt.gov](mailto:ChrisWilhelm@mt.gov)



Northeast Montana One-Stop

For a complete listing of a One-Stop near you visit  
<http://wsd.dli.mt.gov/wia/locations.asp>



# THE DOLLARS AND SENSE OF MINIMUM WAGE

Author: Tonya McCormack

**The United States introduced statutory minimum wages nationally in 1938 as part of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA). Montana adopted minimum wage and overtime laws in 1971.**

**Q:** What is the minimum wage in Montana?

**A:** Effective January 1, 2007, Montana's minimum wage increased to \$6.15 per hour. This increase is a result of the passage of Initiative 151, approved by Montana voters November 2006. The minimum wage had been at \$5.15 per hour since September 1, 1997.

**Q:** Is the minimum wage tied to cost-of-living adjustments?

**A:** Initiative 151 requires an annual cost-of-living adjustment to the minimum wage each September for the following year. The annual adjustment is based on the percentage increase in the US City Average Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers for All Items during the previous 12 months. Under the new law, the minimum wage is to be rounded to the nearest five cents and takes effect on January 1 of each year beginning 2008.

A business not covered by the federal Fair Labor Standards Act whose gross annual sales are \$110,000 or less may pay \$4.00 per hour.

Farm workers not subject to federal FLSA may be paid either the hourly minimum wage or a minimum monthly wage of at least \$635.

**Q:** Where can I find the Consumer Price Index (CPI)?

**A:** Information on the CPI can be found on the Department of Labor and Industry's website at [www.ourfactsyourfuture.mt.gov](http://www.ourfactsyourfuture.mt.gov).

**Q:** How will I find out what the new minimum wage will be?

**A:** Information on what the new minimum wage can be found on the Department of Labor and Industry's website at [www.mtwagehourbopa.com](http://www.mtwagehourbopa.com) or by calling the Wage and Hour Unit at (406) 444-5600.

**Q:** What is the federal minimum wage?

**A:** Effective July 24, 2007, the federal minimum wage increased by 70 cents to \$5.85, with additional scheduled increases over the next two years.

**Q:** So which minimum wage am I required to pay my employee, the state or the federal?

**A:** A business that falls under the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) or has employees that fall under the FLSA must pay their employees whatever provides for the higher rate at the time. Currently the state rate prevails.



Tonya McCormack

**Q:** How much has the minimum wage increased in recent years?

**A:** A recent minimum wage history:

| STATE     |          |
|-----------|----------|
| \$3.80/hr | 04/01/90 |
| \$4.00/hr | 04/01/91 |
| \$4.25/hr | 04/26/91 |
| \$4.75/hr | 10/01/96 |
| \$5.15/hr | 09/01/97 |
| \$6.15/hr | 01/01/07 |

| FEDERAL   |          |
|-----------|----------|
| \$3.80/hr | 04/01/90 |
| \$4.25/hr | 04/01/91 |
| \$4.75/hr | 10/01/96 |
| \$5.15/hr | 09/01/97 |
| \$5.85/hr | 07/24/07 |

**Q:** Can I count an employee's tips against the minimum wage?

**A:** Although allowed under federal FLSA, Montana law does not have this allowance. Therefore, tips can not be credited against an employer's minimum wage obligation. Tips belong to the employees.

**Q:** If I pay my employee on a commission, piece rate or salary does the minimum wage law still apply?

**A:** Yes. Unless your employee falls into an exempt category, you must pay the employee at least minimum wage for all hours worked. This means that even with a commissioned, piece rate or salary employee, you must track all daily and weekly hours worked to determine whether the average hourly rate meets the minimum wage. If the average hourly rate is less than the applicable minimum wage in any pay period, you must boost the employee's wages up to the minimum wage in effect.

For more information on Montana Wage and Hour laws, please contact the Labor Standards Bureau at 406-444-5600 or visit our website at [www.mtwagehourbopa.com](http://www.mtwagehourbopa.com).

# BUILDING BLOCKS OF EDUCATION

Author: Dave Cook

The Montana Department of Labor and Industry, Business Standards Division, Bureau of Building & Measurement Standards held its second annual Building Education Conference April 3-5 in Bozeman.

"The Building Blocks conference provides an opportunity to solidify the builder-designer-code official relationship by demonstrating how building code enforcement translates to safer construction work environments, positively impacts worker comp rates, and strengthens the overall economic climate," said Administrator Mike Cooney.

This year's conference was an overwhelming success with attendance totaling 670 participants and an average daily attendance in excess of 220 people representing an equal mix of building code officials, design professionals and building contractors. Nationally recognized instructors from the International Code Council, private and governmental agencies and local professionals provided 25 topical sessions which included updates on the recently adopted newer editions of the codes, fundamentals of green buildings, code essentials for contractors, residential construction safety, energy concepts for designers and more.



Independent Contractor Booth, 2006 Conference



Conference Luncheon

The conference encouraged networking and idea sharing during the hosted luncheon, expo social event and numerous roundtable discussions. The interactive sessions, new to this year's conference, gave the participants a great opportunity to discuss issues affecting their part of the design-build-code enforcement equation. Updates to the numerous building codes, continuous development of new methods and materials, and changes in construction practices pose great challenges for all the participants.

The conference is designed to help keep current on changes and be aware of how these changes affect the approach to design, building, and enforcement. Bureau staff was able to identify possible changes to internal business processes that would re-focus efforts to provide sound and continuous customer service.

The Vendor Expo provided a venue for local and national vendors to display their products and services, provide materials, and showcase techniques. Information was available from a host of suppliers and organizations, including the Department's Contractor Registration unit.

In the process, the event received some very favorable local TV news coverage and rave reviews from its vendors and participants. Building partners have encouraged the Bureau to expand the format for the 2008 conference.

Please make plans to attend the 3rd Annual Building Blocks Conference, April 7 -11, 2008 at the Gran Tree Inn in Bozeman, where attendees will enjoy an expanded number of workshops, the vendor expo and lots of networking opportunities. For additional information, please contact Dave Cook, Program Manager at phone 406-841-2053 or email at [dcook@mt.gov](mailto:dcook@mt.gov).

The Montana Worklife Wellness Coalition and the Department of Public Health and Human Services are pleased to acknowledge nine exemplary businesses for their achievements in worksite wellness. Each of these companies provides benefits to employees through worksite wellness programming (aka health and productivity management) that assists the employee in reducing individual health risk. By investing in wellness, employers equally benefit with a return on investment (ROI). Joan Miles, Department Director, presented each employer with a plaque at the 2007 Montana Conference on Worklife Wellness. During the awards ceremony, each organization was asked about the ROI their programming achieved. Award recipients' responses included: financial rewards and savings, increased employee job satisfaction, decreased employee turnover, improved quality of life, improved employee morale and reduced absenteeism. Douglas Mead, Wellness Supervisor for employees of Kalispell Regional Medical Center and the sole recipient of the Gold Award, described the transformation within their organization as "life changing--one can walk into our facilities and feel the difference in employee attitudes and productivity."

The six Bronze award winners included: Billings Clinic and St. John's Lutheran Ministries in Billings, the City of Missoula, Glacier Bancorp, Inc. (statewide), Montana University System Wellness Program, and the Health Care and Benefits Division which runs the wellness program for all State of Montana employees. The two Silver award recipients were: Carroll College (Helena) and Immanuel Lutheran Corporation (Kalispell). The single Gold winner is Northwest Healthcare, Inc. and The Summit Medical Fitness Center in Kalispell. For more information on how to apply for an Excellence Award, please visit <http://montanacardiovascular.mt.gov> or contact Chelsea Fagen at [cfagen@mt.gov](mailto:cfagen@mt.gov).



# What's the Score?

## First and Goal: Assistance for Business Clinics

| City        | Date    | Location                | Sponsor      | Phone    | Fee       |
|-------------|---------|-------------------------|--------------|----------|-----------|
| Butte       | Sept 12 | Red Lion Hotel          | Chamber      | 723-3177 | \$40      |
| Lewistown   | Sept 19 | Yogo Inn                | JSEC/Chamber | 538-8701 | \$35/30** |
| Great Falls | Sept 20 | Town House Inn          | Chamber      | 761-4434 | \$40/50*  |
| Polson      | Oct 3   | Lake County Health Dept | JSEC         | 883-7885 | \$40/35** |
| Missoula    | Oct 4   | Quality Inn             | Chamber      | 543-6623 | \$35/45** |

Registration fees are set by the local sponsor to cover facility costs, including lunch. For more information or to register, please contact your local sponsor.

**\*Higher prices indicated are for participants that are not current chamber members and \*\* are for 2 or more attending participants.**

## Scoring Drive

**28th Annual Montana Arbitrator's Training and Labor Relations Conference**, Sept 19, 20, and 21, Park Plaza Hotel, Helena, fees apply. Contact Vicki Knudsen, 406-444-0038 or [vknudsen@mt.gov](mailto:vknudsen@mt.gov) to register.

**Global Trade Certificate Program- Segment 1: Who, Why and When: Globalization and the Local Economy, Evaluation of Global Potential & Keys to Market Entry**, Sept 13 & 14, Montana Manufacturing Extension Center, Bozeman, fees apply. Contact Nicole Haggerman, 406-243-6982 to register.

**IAWP Fall Institute**, Sept 27 & 28, early bird starts the 27th at 6:30 pm; Institute starts at 9 am on the 28th at the Grand Union Hotel, Fort Benton, hosted by the Great Falls IAWP, fees apply. Contact Betty Peterson, 406-791-5818

**The Governor's Conference on Workers' Compensation and Occupational Safety & Health**, Oct 3 – 5, Big Sky Resort, Big Sky, fees apply, visit <http://erd.dli.mt.gov/upevents/govconf.asp> or contact Dave Elenbaas, 406-444-6527, [daelenbaas@mt.gov](mailto:daelenbaas@mt.gov).

**Montana Human Resource Conference**, Oct 2 – 4, KwaTuq Nuk Resort, Polson, Sponsored by MT Dept of Administration, visit <http://hrconference/mt.gov> to register.

**Global Trade Certificate Program- Segment 2: How to Develop a Global Strategy: Global Sales, Financing, Logistics & Distribution**, Oct 18-19, Holiday Inn Parkside, Missoula, fees apply. Contact Nicole Haggerman, 406-243-6982 to register.

**JMG Fall Leadership Conference**, Oct 24, Red Lion Colonial, Helena, sponsored by Jobs for Montana's Graduates, contact Drea Brown, 406-444-0978.

**Global Trade Certificate Program- Segment 3: Putting it all Together: Global Transactions & Industry Breakout Sessions**, Nov 8-9, Montana Tech Campus, Butte, fees apply. Contact Nicole Haggerman, 406-243-6982 to register.

## Touchdown

**Bozeman Area Safety and Health (BASH)**, Sept 14, Oct 12, Nov 9, and Dec 14, Deaconess Hospital, Bozeman, 2-3pm, contact 406-994-7384.

**Southwestern Montana Area Safety and Health (SMASH)**, Sept 13, Oct 11, Nov 8, Gold Rush Casino, Butte, 12-1 pm, contact 406-723-2141 pr 406-496-4463.

## Occupational Safety and Health Training Institute

|                                                   |           |             |
|---------------------------------------------------|-----------|-------------|
| OSHA Forklift Operator Training Requirements      | Sept 20   | Miles City  |
| Reducing Ergonomic Injuries in the Workplace      | Sept 25   | Glendive    |
| OSHA Compressed Gas & Welding Requirements        | Oct 11    | Miles City  |
| OSHA 10-Hour General Industry                     | Oct 17-18 | Miles City  |
| Effective Workplace Accident Investigations       | Oct 18    | Great Falls |
| OSHA Fire Protection & Emergency Action Plans     | Nov 8     | Glendive    |
| Conducting Effective Workplace Safety Inspections | Nov 8     | Billings    |
| Effective Workplace Safety Management Systems     | Nov 8     | Helena      |
| OSHA Fire Protection and Emergency Action Plans   | Nov 8     | Glendive    |

Check out our extended menu of events on  
<http://app.mt.gov/cal/event?calendar>

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*Montana*  
**Department of Labor and Industry**

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